

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 06 November 2007		2. REPORT TYPE FINAL		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE PROVISIONAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAMS: AN OPERATIONAL IMPERATIVE				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Andrew G Wilcox, Lieutenant Colonel, USMC Paper Advisor (if Any): Professor Ted Gatchel				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Joint Military Operations Department Naval War College 686 Cushing Road Newport, RI 02841-1207				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution Statement A: Approved for public release; Distribution is unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES A paper submitted to the Naval War College faculty in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Joint Military Operations Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.					
14. ABSTRACT World events have changed requiring a holistic approach to conflict prevention and termination, instability, and multi-dimensional enabling environments with difficult, wicked problem sets. Today operational success has a much broader definition that includes, winning the peace. PRTs are the one solution set to stability operations to evolve out of OEF/OIF. They are an operational imperative because PRTs tactically address causes and symptoms to the social fabric in multi-dimensional, complex, near post-conflict environments. The existence of PRTs is recognition of the interdependence of development and security: development cannot exist without security and security will not be possible without development. The PRT construct is a multi-national, interagency, joint answer to these wicked problem sets. They are the one vehicle to harness all elements of national power and provide an economy of force option attractive to many international partners. So important is the PRT construct, that the U.S. Government has codified its operations into law and policy. NGOs, the most vocal institutions opposing the PRT construct, are starting to view PRTs less as competitors and more as value-added entities. While certainly not the panacea to SSTR operations, PRTs have many remaining challenges to overcome before becoming a permanent part of the development, diplomatic, and military landscape. Nevertheless, PRTs remain the best option to confront the multitude of challenges resident in complex operations.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Provisional Reconstruction Teams, PRTs, stability operations, SSTR					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 25	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON Chairman, JMO Dept
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code) 401-841-3556

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PROVISIONAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAMS: AN OPERATIONAL IMPERATIVE

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: _____

November 6, 2007

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Abstract

Provisional Reconstruction Teams: an Operational Imperative

World events have changed requiring a holistic approach to conflict prevention and termination, instability, and multi-dimensional enabling environments with difficult, wicked problem sets. Today operational success has a much broader definition that includes, winning the peace. PRTs are the one solution set to stability operations to evolve out of OEF/OIF. They are an operational imperative because PRTs tactically address causes and symptoms to the social fabric in multi-dimensional, complex, near post-conflict environments. The existence of PRTs is recognition of the interdependence of development and security: development cannot exist without security and security will not be possible without development. The PRT construct is a multi-national, interagency, joint answer to these wicked problem sets. They are the one vehicle to harness all elements of national power and provide an economy of force option attractive to many international partners. So important is the PRT construct, that the U.S. Government has codified its operations into law and policy. NGOs, the most vocal institutions opposing the PRT construct, are starting to view PRTs less as competitors and more as value-added entities. While certainly not the panacea to SSTR operations, PRTs have many remaining challenges to overcome before becoming a permanent part of the development, diplomatic, and military landscape. Nevertheless, PRTs remain the best option to confront the multitude of challenges resident in complex operations.

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INTRODUCTION

The provisional reconstruction team (PRT) construct is an operational imperative and one of the most significant operational concepts to evolve from Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Further, “events in Afghanistan and Iraq clearly indicate the stability phase is often the more challenging and decisive phase in military operations.”¹ The U.S. Marine Corps’ *Small Wars Manual* makes this very point. “Military planners might choose to consider the initial conventional phase as the shaping phase, rather than the decisive phase. If our political objectives can only be accomplished after a successful stability phase, then the stability phase is the de facto, decisive phase.”² PRTs are an operational and strategic recognition of this point; success is not only crushing enemy combat forces, but also setting the conditions for a society in jeopardy to become stable and productive. They are an attempt to promote stability by broadly addressing not only symptoms, but also the underlying causes of violence. Further, the Defense Science Board’s 2004 Summer Study, *Transition to and from Hostilities* highlighted, “since the end of the Cold War, the United States has been involved in either a stability or reconstruction operation every 18 to 24 months, that these operations typically last 5 to 8 years, and that these activities surpass combat operations in the cost of human lives and dollars [emphasis added].”³ PRTs are the first model, local in orientation, to combine humanitarian, reconstruction, diplomatic, and military security in one organization focused on stability operation’s complex relationship of factors.

This paper aims to present an argument why PRTs are an operational imperative and the one of the most significant operational concepts to evolve out of OEF/OIF. It will combine the author’s real world operational experiences as a PRT commander in Zabul Afghanistan with an extensive literature review.⁴

PRT ascendancy and evolution are a result of many conditions. The expanding, multi-dimensional nature of today’s threat is dependent on weak, unstable states with ungoverned

spaces. Moreover, this dependency of the threat on a host environment has altered our metric for winning the long war—*winning the peace is our measure of success* and has not traditionally been the domain of the military. Operational success requires a stable, non-conductive environment. Moreover, to be successful in this long war requires harnessing all elements of national power: diplomatic, informational, military, and economic (DIME) and not just at the strategic and operational level of war, but also the tactical level. Additionally, nation states are opting for an economy of force model, reluctant to commit large ground forces, whose presence undermines stability operations. PRTs serve as an economy of force deterrence option. Finally, the PRT construct using Security, Stability, Transition, and Reconstruction (SSTR) operations are official U.S. Government policy and represent a significant paradigm change. Only one emerging concept has the capability and capacity to perform these functions within an enduring security requirement, the PRT.

BACKGROUND

The PRT concept originates from U.S. initiatives in OEF. It has evolved into 25 PRTs in Afghanistan from 23 contributing nations (Canada, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Australia, Lithuania, Denmark, Croatia, Iceland, Italy, Hungary, France, Spain, Germany, Czech Republic, Switzerland, Belgium, Romania, Finland, Norway, Latvia, Korea, New Zealand, and Turkey) and 25 PRTs in Iraq of various designs.⁵ Currently in Iraq, there are seven U.S. led PRTs, three coalition, and 15 “embedded” PRTs (ePRTs) with combat brigades.⁶ In addition, the largest operating U.S. PRT is not in Afghanistan or Iraq, rather Haiti and a Department of State representative is the commander.⁷ In total, the United States and its allies are working toward 51 operational PRTs.

The original PRT construct started with standing up Coalition Joint Civil-Military Operations Task Force (CJCMOTF) November 2001, in Kabul. The concept of individual civil affairs units did not get off the ground until the establishment of Joint Regional Teams (JRT) at

the U.S. Embassy on November 21, 2002.⁸ A year later at the behest of President Karzi, the JRTs were changed to Provisional Reconstruction Teams. In Iraq, the PRT concept was established with Cable 4045 issued by the U.S. Embassy-Iraq and Multi-National Force, Iraq (MNF-I) in October 2005.⁹

The term, Provisional Reconstruction Teams, no longer characterizes or reflects the true nature of PRT operations.¹⁰ PRTs are involved in much more than reconstruction and primarily focused on building capacity in provincial governments. The original PRT charter emphasized coordinating and identifying local reconstruction needs, conducting village assessments, and liaisoning with regional commanders. As the Afghan theater matured, the PRT charter expanded to include additional types of operations, now common to both Afghanistan and Iraq.

Historically, something akin to a PRT has existed in most conflicts and near-conflicts. An early example is the U.S. Philippine Insurrection campaign (1899-1902) use of over 500 small garrisons where personnel lived, worked, fought insurgents, developed rapport with the locals, and implemented civil affairs projects.¹¹ More recently, the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support program (CORDS) existed with great success during the Vietnam conflict. “CORDS had a dramatic impact on weakening the VietCong insurgency. While the U. S. government [has] struggled to provide eight agriculture experts to PRTs, about 100 Americans agricultural advisors served in Vietnam. In fact, at one time there were 6,464 military, 1,137 civilian, and 233 third country advisors stationed in Vietnam.”¹² The United States is not the only country to understand the value in a PRT-like construct; the British used a similar construct in their India campaign along the North-West frontier.¹³

What is revolutionary about the PRT concept today is the multinational, interagency, joint institutional nature. All services, many government agencies, and 23 international countries are commanding or participating in PRTs in Afghanistan and Iraq. It is too early to tell if this multinational, interagency, joint model will prove as effective as the CORDS model. Challenges

still exist in staffing PRTs with appropriate experts. The Department of State and civilian agencies have had a difficult time finding personnel, because they rely on volunteers, and because of the dangers still in Iraq and Afghanistan.

PRT CONSTRUCT

Generally, a Lieutenant Colonel, or equivalent, commands a PRT. An infantry platoon or company serves as the force protection element with a dedicated medical component providing medical services to PRT personnel and leading civil-medical operations. A civil affairs (CA) detachment will normally include CA personnel and vertical engineers¹⁴ for project management and quality assurance. Communications, administrative, intelligence, and maintenance personnel round-out the military aspect of the PRT. Also assigned, some PRTs have military police mentors and psychological operations personnel.

The PRT is the only paradigm that combines all elements of National Power (Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic or DIME) in a construct at *the tactical level*. The United States Agency for International Aid (USAID) and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) provide the civilian developmental leads for PRTs. The Department of State (DOS) fields representatives to each PRT to lead the diplomatic initiatives. Normally assigned to each PRT, Minister of Interior personnel facilitate coordination with local police. Interpreters, cooks, and local security personnel flush out the PRT organizations with an aggregate personnel structure of 100 to 150.

Reserve and National Guard personnel tend to staff PRTs, whose personnel are usually older, wiser, and bring civilian technical skill sets related to stability operations. In fact, 88 percent of the U.S. Army's civil affairs personnel are in the reserves. Reserves and National Guardsmen are ideally suited for PRT operations and generally have a better temperament for stability operations than an 18-year old Marine or Army infantryman.

Because PRTs have so many different stakeholders, often with no command relationships, their success hinges on the ability to develop unity of effort with PRT resources, non-government organizations (NGOs), and local government officials. To be successful, PRTs must incorporate qualified locals in the organization and decision-making. These actions provide the PRT with legitimacy and a local knowledge base. Curt Tarnoff, a specialist in foreign affairs in his report to Congress, “Iraq: Recent Developments in Reconstruction Assistance” noted this same finding: “Security is the predominant issue in Iraqi minds, and that governance is a largely negative picture. It suggests that U.S. efforts are too focused on national level politics and that efforts to support local political bodies are not backed by sufficient funding.”¹⁵

PRTs’ ability to collaborate, cooperate and communicate provincial goals to stakeholders determines its success. The PRT acts as a “clearing house” where all reconstruction, governance, economic development, and humanitarian efforts are coordinated. Failure to develop unity of effort creates unnecessary duplication of scarce resources, wasted assets and confusion. Every PRT will have a unique personality, but all will share in the same challenge of getting many disparate organizations to come together as a team. They have the potential to serve as a showcase for “tactical interagency jointness.”¹⁶

NATURE OF THE THREAT

“The changing geopolitical climate over the past decade has altered the role and function of the military.”¹⁷ The end of the Cold War, aggravated by the events of 9/11, ushered in a broader definition of threats facing stable societies—“weak states vulnerable to internal strife and international terrorist.”¹⁸ Much like a Petri dish cultivates bacteria in a lab; weak states, instability, and ungoverned space become fertile ground for terrorism, extremism, and insurgency. Environmental factors that breed instability are as much a part of the military operational equation as enemy order of battle.

Increased emphasis on security, an enduring security of instability, and an ill-defined, intractable battlefield thrust militaries into nation building, something they were not entirely prepared or trained to do. Traditional, kinetic military action alone will not completely overcome the environment that breeds instability, extremism, and terrorism. Conventional military units, such as infantry battalions, do not possess the organic skill sets necessary to build host nation capacities and leverage all elements of national power at the tactical level. Additionally, asking combat units to partake in capacity building creates mission creep and dilutes focus. Juxtaposed to this broader view of the threat is a fundamental shift in how militaries and societies define operational success.

“Winning the peace,” could perhaps be defined as preventing conflict from re-emerging by building host nation capacity to function without violence thereby laying the foundation for a sustainable, durable peace.¹⁹ This change in metric, “winning the peace” takes the form of Security, Stability, Transition, and Reconstruction (SSTR) operations. The PRT is a construct designed to implement SSTR at the tactical level. PRTs conduct operations in a multi-dimensional environment, building host nation (HN) capacities and making the HN less vulnerable to internal instability, strife and terrorism. Nevertheless, PRTs cannot conduct SSTR operations in all security environments.

A degree of peace and stability must exist before any level of reconstruction or nation building can commence. PRTs are most appropriate when there is “mid-range of violence that precludes NGOs from operating and not so acute that combat operations predominate.”²⁰ Having their own force protection and mobility assets allows PRTS to operate in complex environments. This is the significant difference between PRTs and other government agencies and non-government agencies involved in capacity building. Nevertheless, even PRTs must have a degree of security before they can operate. Areas in Iraq, where PRTs were introduced, have not met with the same success as in Afghanistan because the security situation in Iraq significantly

limits PRT personnel from carrying out their mission.²¹ Furthermore, security environments in which PRTs operate in are heavily influenced by their proximity to friendly maneuver units.

PRTs tend to come in two flavors: located with coalition/friendly forces and operating completely independently, such as the Farah PRT in Afghanistan. PRTs with coalition forces in the same province are at a distinct advantage. Coalition forces focus primarily on security issues leaving the PRT to concentrate all resources on governance, reconstruction, and economic development. Because PRTs are heavily military, they are in much better position to coordinate actions with coalition forces: they can talk the language. In contrast, an NGO/IGO or civilian-like organization does not have this advantage. PRTs provide reconstruction, economic infusions, and security where NGO/IGOs cannot, or will not go. They “reflect a move towards a more integrated approach to security and reconstruction in transition societies, and recognizes [sic] also the interdependence of development and security.”²² A recent article in the *Los Angeles Times* makes this point regarding USAID's inability to provide project oversight on millions of dollars of infrastructure projects.

The real victim of the ‘safety at any cost’ policy was the U.S. development program. Government careers and inflated contractor salaries depended on keeping civilians out of harm's way. As a result, bodyguards looking out for civilians halted work at the slightest hint of trouble. In theory, billions of dollars were being spent every month on new roads, sewers, hospitals and schools, but much of the work went unsupervised during election campaigns, holidays -- both U.S. and Iraqi -- and whenever the threat level increased. One director of the USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives *signed millions of dollars' worth of grants over the course of her year in Baghdad yet left the Green Zone only once to inspect completed work* [emphasis added].²³

The systemic and chronic corruption present in Afghanistan and Iraq require constant vigilance of reconstruction projects. PRTs have this organic capacity with vertical engineers (usually Seabees or military construction engineers) to ensure quality assurance, and an infantry component for mobility and force protection. The PRT is the only organization possessing this capability.

Every PRT can be customized to peculiarities of the ground including friendly force disposition, local government needs, and the security environment. Flexibility and autonomy of the PRT construct are its greatest strength, allowing individual PRTs to emphasize different aspects within their types of operations depending on its security situation, national charter, and relationship/proximity to friendly forces.

While flexibility has its advantages, it cannot become a “euphemism for ambiguity.”²⁴ Paradoxically, the flexibility of the PRT construct is also its greatest weakness with a vague charter and improvisation as its concept of operations. Although some hail the PRT as the panacea for stability operations, not all support its construct.

THE DEBATE

The contemporary and contentious debate concerning PRTs involves encroachment on NGO space. NGOs object to PRTs as an issue of ideology. They object to the “use of aid and development as a vehicle to reinforce strategic policy objectives.”²⁵ NGO grievances tend to come in six forms:²⁶

- Violate humanitarian tenants of neutrality, impartiality, and based only on the criteria of need
- Encroach on humanitarian space of NGOs
- Blur the distinction between combatant and non-combatant
- Are not cost effective and duplicate services provide by NGOs
- Lack the capacity for humanitarian operations
- Distract military from primary mission of security

However, the PRT construct complements NGO operations, filling the void where security issues prevent NGOs from operating. PRTs can provide an enabling security environment for humanitarian assistance and, only a supplier of humanitarian assistance when NGOs are absent. “The entrenchment of the PRT [in humanitarian operations] however, is less a reflection of an underlying consensus on the concept than the realization that, in light of limited international resources, it is the best solution available”²⁷

NGO opposition to PRTs is fervent and vocal; although, NGOs make no argument regarding the impact PRTs have on NGOs' fund raising. One only needs to consider the initial actions of many NGOs during the early days of Operation Unified Assistance, Indonesia tsunami relief operation and during humanitarian operations in Afghanistan to understand the true underlying opposition of some NGOs.²⁸ The initial efforts of some NGOs during the catastrophic tsunami relief operation were "photo-ops" for fund raising, not relief operations. Combine this with the former Ministry of Planning for the Government of Afghanistan, Ramazan Bachardoust comments, "most of the NGOs [operating in Afghanistan] are not legitimate aid organizations and are merely interested in money" and one begins to understand NGO opposition to PRTs. The Afghan government has been highly critical of NGOs, accusing them of "malfeasance, rather than scarce international resources responsible for the slow pace of development...misusing development funds to purchase expensive vehicles, take vacations, and (in Afghan terms) live luxurious lifestyles." Allegations as such, tarnish all NGOs—including the legitimate altruistic NGOs on motives, image and result in hostility and non-cooperation.²⁹ The friction between militaries and NGOs, in addition to the fund raising issue, is partially centered on humanitarian organizations' desire to leverage military security and mobility assets and subsequently disavow any relationship with the military. As a final point, NGO personnel tend to have ideological incongruence with military objectives and culture.

While some of the aforementioned NGO concerns are valid, many concerns regarding an ambiguous charter and inefficiencies were growing pains associated with the early years of PRTs. This author's experience is in stark contrast to capacity and efficiency issues. For example, the USAID field agents in Afghanistan do not have the discretion to award provincial projects. All USAID contracts are awarded out of Kabul often to non-local firms at 2-3 times the rate the local PRT would pay for the same project. In addition, PRTs tend to use local labor, which is cheaper and resonates with the local community. Furthermore, PRT engineers and

security personnel manage many USAID and local provincial government projects because of their engineering and mobility assets. Indeed, the Governor of Zabul, Haji Delbar Arman, proposed the Qalat PRT manage all reconstruction projects in Zabul, regardless of where the funding came. Governor Arman, certainly “the customer,” recognized the Qalat PRT as the most capable and efficient organization to manage small to medium scale reconstruction projects.

NGOs also make the case military personnel conducting similar missions blur the lines between combatant and non-combatant. This argument assumes belligerent forces will act rationally and respect non-combatants neutrality and independence. This assumption ignores the fact NGOs and military forces have the same objective, a stable society. This similarity of objectives, regardless of independent and neutral status, makes NGOs a target. Many NGO members have paid with their lives in Afghanistan and Iraq to learn enemy forces are not always rational, do not respect neutrality or independence of a non-combatant status, and often manipulate NGOs at every opportunity. One need only watch the daily news to view the latest NGO abduction to appreciate this point.

The remaining NGO opposition centers on effectiveness, experience, and capacity of military forces to conduct humanitarian and development missions. NGOs also voice concerns that humanitarian assistance (HA) missions distract military forces from their primary mission of security. A recent Government Accounting Office (GAO) report concluded security cost represented 16 to 22 percent of the overall cost of infrastructure reconstruction.³⁰ Furthermore, the Center for Strategic and International Studies estimates, “Post-Conflict Reconstruction security costs at 30% of project funds; insurance and salaries at 12%; corruption at 15%; overhead at 10%; and profits at 6%.”³¹ “In a highly critical audit, the special inspector general for Iraq estimated reconstruction as much as 30 percent of funding spent on security costs.”³² Therefore, PRTs actually reduce the cost of reconstruction by improving security conditions.

Military forces conducting humanitarian operations are well within their charter and interest. Humanitarian and development assistance focuses on environmental factors that breed instability. In the last 20 years, the U.S. military has conducted more humanitarian assistance (HA) operations than combat operations. The author's experience reflects the same balance having participated in the San Francisco earthquake operation, Mn Pinatubo volcanic eruption relief and mudslide relief operations in the Philippines, Los Angeles riots, Indonesian tsunami relief operation, but only two combat operations: the Gulf War and OEF. The NGO argument, militaries do not have the experience, is simply not correct and reflects an identity crisis bordering on paranoia. Militaries view "relief operations as key to enhancing the military's peace-support mission, contributing to force protection and thus stabilization."³³

One report, "Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs): an analysis of their contribution to security in Afghanistan," written by Charlotte Watkins hints NGOs and PRT operations are a result of inevitable relationship. "Given that the implementation of humanitarian activities by military personnel is one of the most effective ways of 'winning hearts and minds', a level of encroachment into the territory of humanitarian actors can therefore be seen as a necessary means to an end."³⁴ Watkins further explains the ascendancy of the PRT model by alluding to failures of the UN to generate unity of effort with NGOs. "Even UN coordinating mechanisms, such as the designation of OCHA or another UN agency as lead focal point for co-ordination, have for the most part failed to solve the problem of how to effectively co-ordinate the often vast numbers of independent agencies operating in the humanitarian theatre."³⁵

Watkins' primer on PRTs makes wide, incorrect assumptions U.S. PRTs are in the business of peace support; when in fact, U.S. PRTs perform non-kinetic counterinsurgency and stability operations. Interestingly, her piece, not at all in favor of PRTs, makes the strongest argument in the literature reviewed for PRT involvement in HA operations:

Military forces, with their 'can-do' mentality, are generally well trained, disciplined, self-supporting and highly organized for operations that require a rapid response. They are often able to transport large volumes of emergency supplies at short notice; have well developed and highly effective communication systems; can be virtually self-sufficient if need be; are well stocked with the sort of resources often in short supply in emergencies; come equipped with their own acute medical care facilities, which can also be put to use to serve local populations; and are skilled in areas useful in emergency situations such as engineering, logistical support, mine clearance, etc.³⁶

Many NGOs are overcoming objections to the PRT construct, realizing PRTs are excellent vehicles to promote increased interaction with the local populations and governments, as a mechanism to protect aid workers and reconstruction efforts.³⁷ “As conflicts down grade from high intensity to persistent low level fighting, humanitarian agencies are not guaranteed safety. The merging of development and security therefore is becoming a more critical necessity.”³⁸ The very presence of PRTs makes it more difficult or even prohibitive for insurgents and bad actors to carry out operations, undermining insurgent’s internal support systems. While NGOs appear more receptive toward the PRT model, competition, ideological differences, and a latent attitude of reticence and resentment will remain.

LAW & POLICY

The U.S. government recognized the operational imperative of PRTs by codifying stability operations into law. National Security Presidential Directive 44 (NSDP-44) directs the Secretary of State with the lead on Stabilization, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction operations (SSTR) and DOD with integrating “stabilization and reconstruction contingency plans with military contingency plans when relevant and appropriate....and [to] develop a general framework to fully coordinating stabilization and reconstruction activities and military operations at all levels.”³⁹ This directive provides the framework for the U.S. Military in collaboration with DoS to implement nation building through the PRT.

The Department of Defense promulgated DOD directive number 3000.05 making SSTR operations a matter of policy. Specifically, DOD directive 3000.05 states, “U.S. military forces

shall be prepared to perform all tasks necessary to establish or maintain order when civilians cannot do so. Successfully, performing such tasks can help secure a lasting peace and facilitate the timely withdrawal of U.S. and foreign forces...Military-civilian teams [read PRT] are a critical U. S. stability operations tool...the Department of Defense shall continue to lead and support the development of military-civilian teams.”⁴⁰ The groundbreaking aspect of this order is that it “reflects a fundamental shift in DOD’s policy because it designates stability operations as a core mission that shall be given priority *comparable to combat operations* [emphasis added] and emphasizes that integrated military and civilian efforts are keys to successful stability operations efforts.”⁴¹ The order also, “places a significant emphasis on the interagency nature of stability operations and the need for a coordinated approach to integrate the efforts of government and nongovernment organizations.”⁴² PRTs, because of their interagency joint nature, can act as the seed or impetus for interagency, joint planning and execution of SSTR operations, something GAO reports criticize DOD for failing to do. Joint, interagency planning remains a challenge because of ambiguous guidance, information sharing challenges, and poor understanding of planning processes.⁴³

DOD’s Joint Operating Concept, Military Support to Stabilization, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction Operations, version 2.0 defines SSTR operations as actions not solely military, but rather requiring civilians, public and private U.S., and international assets undertaking the following activities representing a strategic view of SSTR operations:

- Assistance to existing or new host nation’s governments with security, essential services and economic development
- Support to stabilize and administer occupied territory
- Care for refugees
- Support for governments faltering due to internal challenges
- Assistance in stabilizing governments struck by a devastating national disaster,
- Limited security cooperation: military and police training to partner nations to increase their capacities⁴⁴

The lack of agreed upon definitions and concepts regarding SSTR operations have resulted in each service addressing SSTR planning, training, and operations differently. The PRT, by default, is the common tactical thread used to conduct SSTR operations.

The Joint Operating Concept functions are classified into six major DOD activities and are an operational view to SSTR operations:

- Conduct strategic communications
- Establish and maintain a safe, secure environment
- Deliver Humanitarian assistance
- Reconstitute critical infrastructure/essential services
- Support economic development
- Establish representative, effective government ⁴⁵

PRTs represent a systems perspective to complex operations with five types of tactical operations nested with the strategic and operational view of SSTR operations:

- Creating a safe and secure environment
- Supporting economic development
- Redeveloping infrastructure
- Enhancing good governance
- Conducting information operations

SSTR operations are not new—just another new acronym. The establishment of the PRT constructs to fill this non-traditional military mission void is a relatively new concept. Building the capacity of the host nations to provide security and good governance for its citizens is the single most important aspect of SSTR operations and tends to be the primary focus of PRTs.⁴⁶

ECONOMY OF FORCE

PRTs are a semi-permanent, long-term, economy of force solution, for the environmental challenges of complex environments. A 2003-RAND study noted there were 18-20 peacekeepers per thousand people in Bosnia and Kosovo. A similar ratio in Iraq and Afghanistan would require more troop capacity than the United States possesses.⁴⁷ Shortages of forces and a need to extend operations were the original catalyst for the PRT construct and “are, in short, being shaped by the constraints of limited available means by which it is hoped the ‘ISAF

[International Security Assistance Force] effect' i.e., stability, will be extended throughout Afghanistan in lieu of extending ISAF itself."⁴⁸ Additionally, perhaps from NATO's experience and inability to withdraw from Bosnia and Kosovo, the alliance "has adopted PRTs as a key goal of stabilizing the mountainous country [Afghanistan] without large-scale occupation—something the alliance is not politically inclined to do."⁴⁹

Of the 23 nations involved in operations in Afghanistan, only seven are conducting offensive counterinsurgency operations: United States, Britain, Canada, Denmark, Netherlands, Romania, and Estonia. The Supreme NATO commander commenting on NATO's participation in Afghanistan had this to say about the alliance, "we have about 102 national restrictions [the 'caveats'], 50 of which I judge to be operationally significant.' Even as they refer to America as a bellicose 'cowboy' nation, they sit back and let us and a handful of other countries expend the money and blood." Like it or not, PRTs are an attractive engagement model to increase international participation in stability operations.

This economy of force option resonates with partner countries. Many partner countries do not have the political will to send combat troops, but are willing to source and operate a PRT giving the operation more legitimacy and a multinational flavor. In Afghanistan and Iraq, 23 and 3 partner countries respectively, are staffing, assisting or operating PRTs. Some critiques view this keenness of other countries to operate a PRT rather than supply combat troops as a way around sending combat troops. One study succinctly makes this point:

PRTs are a relatively low-risk (militarily), low-cost and politically conservative alternative to a more robust military presence. Some interviewees asserted that by using PRTs, international actors may be failing to provide the government [Afghanistan] with the necessary support it requires to fulfill its responsibilities to protect its civilians...Within NATO, there is private acceptance amongst some that the PRTs represent a pragmatic response to the reality that many member states are reluctant to deliver on their pledges of troops and funding to support NATO-ISAF expansion.⁵⁰

The unique concept of the PRT construct was, therefore, born to enhance stability as an economy of force mission with the same potential effect as large ground forces; PRTs are often described as a latent military force. PRTs are not designed, nor chartered to engage in combat operations per se; rather, they retain reach back capabilities to coalition effects, which ensures their security. They are conceived as a trigger for larger combat forces should the need arise. This economy of force construct works and has the teeth to compel compliance. On study notes this effect:

The Afghans believed that PRTs could “reach back” to forward support bases of the U.S. forces for immediate, massive, and overwhelming firepower from the air, including deep strike aircraft (B-52)...This “B-52 factor” or *virtual sanction* capability of PRTs was helping not only to avert clashes between rival factions, but also it contributed to efforts of seeking compliance from recalcitrant commanders and warlords with the DDR process. Indeed, what kept the warlords in the DDR process was partially the fear that pulling out would incur the wrath of the U.S. military.⁵¹

PRTs work and those that observe their actions on the ground laud their accomplishments. Dr. Barham Salih, Iraq’s Deputy Prime Minister commenting on PRTs stated, “PRTs have been characterized as a ‘brilliant concept’ because, ‘they deal directly with the local leaders.’”⁵² Lieutenant General Vines, who commanded coalition forces in Afghanistan, referring to PRTs, stated, “The scope and scale of projects being undertaken by provincial reconstruction teams throughout Afghanistan are among the best defenses against terrorism...[they] are a stroke of near-genius....It is something the Taliban recognizes they can not compete with.”⁵³ A GAO report concluded PRTs “have a positive effect on the security and were a useful tool for expanding local support for both the U.S. presence and the Afghan government.”⁵⁴ A recent USAID report titled, “Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan, and Interagency Assessment,” concludes the same:

PRT can be an effective political-military tool in the strategy to stabilize Afghanistan’s remote provinces. PRTs helped extend the authority of the central government by providing technical and organizational support to governors and provincial ministries. PRTs also delivered reconstruction and humanitarian

assistance in remote, violent areas where no other development actors have been able or willing to operate.⁵⁵

CONCLUSION

PRTs are the one solution set to stability operations to evolve out of OEF/OIF. Like farm tractors, PRTs assist host nations in plowing the fertile ground of instability and nourishing the basic seeds of a society. They are an operational imperative because PRTs tactically address causes and symptoms to the social fabric in multi-dimensional, complex, near post-conflict environments. The existence of PRTs is recognition of the interdependence of development and security; development cannot exist without security and security will not be possible without development.

World events have changed requiring a holistic approach to conflict termination, instability, and multi-dimensional enabling environments with difficult, wicked problem sets. Operational success has a much broader definition that including, winning the peace. The PRT construct is a multi-national, interagency, joint answer to these wicked problem sets. They are harnessing all elements of national power and provide an economy of force option attractive to many international partners. So important is the PRT construct, that the U.S. Government has codified its operations into law and policy.

NGOs, the most vocal institutions opposing the PRT construct are starting to view PRTs less as competitors and more as value-added entities. While certainly not the panacea to SSTR operations, PRTs have many remaining challenges to overcome before becoming a permanent part of the development, diplomatic, and military landscape. Nevertheless, PRTs remain the best option to confront the multitude of challenges resident in complex operations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The PRT concept has evolved and improved from its initial debut in 2001. Many challenges remain to make the PRT a permanent construct in the American military, diplomatic,

and development landscape. First, DOD and DoS must develop a mutual framework and memorandum of agreement addressing doctrine, leadership, funding, resources, and operations. Too often PRT staffs focus on operational support rather than mission accomplishment. The bulging bureaucracy of the U.S. Government must not be an impediment to mission accomplishment: the enemy provides enough friction.

Second, PRTs need “clarity of purpose” articulated in a concise, specific charter. Too often, their *modus operandi* is improvisation. There cannot be confusion on what PRTs do; many international actors consider PRT operations as peace support, while U.S. PRTs are certainly involved in counterinsurgency operations. PRTs have proven their value and worth and now requiring permanent institutions with appropriate, personnel, equipment and authority.

Third, serious consideration should be given to developing a standing PRT at all joint headquarters for deployment to natural disasters, emerging stability operations, and nesting all SSTR planning activities into one entity.

Finally, PRTs must be staffed with our best and brightest. Indeed, if we believe the stability phase is the decisive phase, as events have proven, we must staff PRTs with our best personnel. Using the PRT construct as a check-in-the-box command opportunity is a recipe for failure.

NOTES

¹ Michael J. McNerney, “Stabilization and Reconstruction in Afghanistan: Are PRTs a Model or a Muddle?” *Parameters*, US Army War College Quarterly: Winter 2005-06 p. 41

² US Marine Corps, *Small Wars* (draft), January 2004, p. 4, <http://www.smallwars.quantico.usmc.mil/SWM/Small%20Wars%20Draft%20Web%202.pdf>.

³ Government Accountability Office, Military Operations: Actions Needed to Improve DOD’s Stability Operations Approach and Enhance Interagency Planning, (Report to the Ranking Member, Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives April 2006) GAO-07-549, p. 1

⁴ The author was the PRT commander in Qalat Afghanistan from April 2005 to December 2005

⁵ Information taken from a variety of sources, briefs, and authors experience in Afghanistan

⁶ Ginger Cruz, Deputy Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, The Role of the Department of Defense in Provisional Reconstruction Teams, (House Committee on Armed Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations) September, 5, 2007

⁷ Lee Blank, Interagency Transformation Education Analysis presentation, Naval War College, October 12, 2007

⁸ Robert Borders, "Provisional Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: a Model for Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development, *Parameters*, Winter: 2005-06

⁹ Stuart Bowen, Inspector General Office of the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, Status of the Provincial Reconstruction Team Program in Iraq, October 2006, p. 2

¹⁰ Provisional Stability Teams is a more appropriate name that encompasses the true nature of PRTs

¹¹ Michael J. McNerney, "Stabilization and Reconstruction in Afghanistan: Are PRTs a Model or a Muddle?" *Parameters*, US Army War College Quarterly: Winter 2005-06 p. 43

¹² Ibid, p. 44

¹³ Andrew M. Roe, "To Create a Stable Afghanistan: Provisional Reconstruction Teams, Good Governance, and a Splash of History," *Military Review*, November-December 2005, p 23.

¹⁴ Vertical engineers are commonly referred to as engineers that build from the ground up

¹⁵ Curt Tarnoff, Specialist in Foreign Affairs Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division CRS Report for Congress, Iraq: Recent Developments in Reconstruction Assistance May 12, 2005, (Order Code RL31833), p. CRS 23

¹⁶ Michael J. McNerney, "Stabilization and Reconstruction in Afghanistan: Are PRTs a Model or a Muddle?" *Parameters*, US Army War College Quarterly: Winter 2005-06 p. 45

¹⁷ Mark Sedra, "Civil-Military Relations in Afghanistan: the Provincial Reconstruction Team Debate," *Policy Research Division of Foreign Affairs*, Canada, p. 2

¹⁸ Ibid p. 2

¹⁹ Charlotte Watkins, "Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs): an analysis of their contribution to security in Afghanistan," September 30, 2003. Submitted in partial fulfillment of the MS degree in Development Practice, Oxford Brookes University

²⁰ USAID Report, Provisional Reconstruction Teams In Afghanistan an Interagency Assessment, June 2006 (PN-ADG-252), p. 6

²¹ Stuart W. Bowen, Inspector General Office of the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, Status of the Provincial Reconstruction Team Program in Iraq, October 29, 2006, p. iii

²² Save the Children, *Provincial Reconstruction Teams and Humanitarian–Military Relations in Afghanistan*, 1 St John's Lane London EC1M 4AR UK, 2004, p. 35

²³ David Devos, "Iraq's Dirty Harrys", *Los Angeles Times*, September, 23 2007

²⁴ Michale J. McNerney, "Stabilization and Reconstruction in Afghanistan: Are PRTs a Model or a Muddle?" *Parameters*, US Army War College Quarterly: Winter 2005-06 p. 36

²⁵ Robert Borders, “Provisional Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: a Model for Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development, *Journal of Development and Social Transformation*, *Parameters*, Winter: 2005-06, p. 1

²⁶ All six areas of grievances taken from Robert Borders, “Provisional Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: a Model for Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development, *Journal of Development and Social Transformation*, *Parameters*, Winter 2005-06, p. 1

²⁷ Mark Sedra, “Civil-Military Relations in Afghanistan: the Provincial Reconstruction Team Debate,” *Policy Research Division of Foreign Affairs*, Canada, p. 1

²⁸ The author was part of the US Military’s Disaster Relief Assessment Team during Operation Unified Assistance, arriving in Sumatra two days after the tsunami disaster and saw first hand the focus of some NGOs--photo ops to facilitate fund raising.

²⁹ Raymond Millen, *Afghanistan: Reconstituting a Collapsed State*, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, April 2005, p. 15

³⁰ Government Accountability Office, Rebuilding Iraq, (Governance, Security Reconstruction, and Financing Challenges, Testimony Before the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations; Committee on Government Reform, House of Representatives, Washington, D.C.,) April 25, 2006, (GAO-06-697T) p. 22

³¹ Curt Tarnoff, Specialist in Foreign Affairs Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division CRS Report for Congress, Iraq: Recent Developments in Reconstruction Assistance May 12, 2005, (Order Code RL31833), p. CRS-18

³² Karen DeYoung, “Reconstruction Effort to Emphasize Iraqi Jobs,” *The Washington Post*, January 11, 2007; A section; A13

³³ Save the Children, *Provincial Reconstruction Teams and Humanitarian–Military Relations in Afghanistan*, 1 St John’s Lane London EC1M 4AR UK, 2004, p. 1

³⁴ Charlotte Watkins, *Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs): an analysis of their contribution to security in Afghanistan*, September 30, 2003. Submitted in partial fulfillment of the MS degree in Development Practice, Oxford Brookes University, p. 10

³⁵ Ibid, p. 13

³⁶ Ibid, p. 11

³⁷ Save the Children, *Provincial Reconstruction Teams and Humanitarian–Military Relations in Afghanistan*, 1 St John’s Lane London EC1M 4AR UK, 2004, p. 20

³⁸ Center for Humanitarian Cooperation (CHC), The Provisional Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Afghanistan and its role and in reconstruction, Internet, May 31, 2003, p. 5

³⁹ National Security Presidential Directive 44 (NSDP-44)

⁴⁰ Department of Defense directive 3000.05

⁴¹ Government Accountability Office, Military Operations: Actions Needed to Improve DOD’s Stability Operations Approach and Enhance Interagency Planning, (Report to the Ranking Member, Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives April 2006) GAO-07-549, p. 13

⁴² Government Accountability Office, Military Operations: Actions Needed to Improve DOD's Stability Operations Approach and Enhance Interagency Planning, (Report to the Ranking Member, Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives April 2006) GAO-07-549, p. 25

⁴³ Government Accountability Office, Military Operations : Actions Needed to Improve DOD's Stability Operations Approach and Enhance Interagency Planning, (Report to the Ranking Member, Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives April 2006) GAO-07-549, p. 29

⁴⁴ Military Support to Stabilization, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction Operation Joint Operating Concept

⁴⁵ Government Accountability Office, Military Operations : Actions Needed to Improve DOD's Stability Operations Approach and Enhance Interagency Planning, (Report to the Ranking Member, Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives April 2006) GAO-07-549, p. 8

⁴⁶ Michael J. McNerney, "Stabilization and Reconstruction in Afghanistan: Are PRTs a Model or a Muddle?" *Parameters*, US Army War College Quarterly: Winter 2005-06 p. 35

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 32

⁴⁸ Barbra Stapleton, Briefing Paper on the Development of Joint Regional Teams in Afghanistan. Retrieved from www.baag.org.uk/downloads/reports/barbara_JRT_report.pdf, 2003, p. 12

⁴⁹ Luke Hill, "Plan to Rebuild Afghanistan tops new NATO agenda," *Jane's Defense Weekly*, January 14, 2004

⁵⁰ Save the Children, *Provincial Reconstruction Teams and Humanitarian-Military Relations in Afghanistan*, 1 St John's Lane London EC1M 4AR UK, 2004, p. 30

⁵¹ Uesugi, Yuji, The Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and their Contribution to the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Process in Afghanistan, Research Fellow, Hiroshima University Partnership for Peace building and Social Capacity (HIPEC)

⁵² Ginger Cruz, Deputy Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, *The Role of the Department of Defense in Provisional Reconstruction Teams*, House Committee on Armed Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, September, 5, 2007

⁵³ Donna Miles, "Terrorists Can't Compete With Provincial Reconstruction Teams," *American Forces Press Service*, Washington, April 21, 2004

⁵⁴ Government Accountability Office, Afghanistan Reconstruction Deteriorating Security and Limited Resources have Impeded Progress; Improvements in U.S. Strategy Needed, (Report to Congressional Committees, Washington, D.C., June 2004, GAO-04-403), p. 20

⁵⁵ USAID Report, Provincial Reconstruction teams in Afghanistan an Interagency Assessment, June 2006 PN-ADG-252, p. 10

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